

The United Nations and Cognitive Dissonance

by Michael Curtis



It seems to me I've heard that song before. It's from an old familiar score. The unholy war against the State of Israel never stops, ideologically, politically, militarily, with unceasing propaganda. On this issue the obsession is far from magnificent. Most nations in the world in discussing Israel suffer from mental disorder or discomfort, from cognitive dissonance, trying to hold two or more contradictory beliefs, both condemnation of Israel, and tolerance or support of Palestinian violence, and calls for a peaceful settlement.

Nowhere is this more evident than in demonstrations and activities and its personnel in the United Nations, the world's major international organization which has been hijacked in irresponsible fashion for purposes contradictory to its declared objectives of promoting and securing international cooperation and maintaining international order.

The exhibition in November 2018 on display in the visitor's lobby in the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City presents images of seventy years of the struggle for Palestinian human rights, lost in the *nakba*, catastrophe, the creation of Israel. In addition, the UN General Assembly on November 29, 2018, will commemorate as it has done since 1978, the Annual Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, pursuant to the Resolution of December 2, 1977, A/RES/32/40, marking the adoption of the UNGA Resolution 181 (11) of November 29, 1947, which called for partition of the disputed territory, and Jerusalem with special status. The fundamental pivotal irony in all this that the Arabs refused, while Israel accepted, that 1947 Resolution and refused to create a Palestinian state at that time.

In recent days, international attention has been focused on political problems and crisis in Israel, even turmoil, as a result of differences within the country over government action, and the cease fire, in the Gaza Strip. The government headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had agreed to a cease-fire after militants and terrorists in Gaza fired 460 rockets and mortar shells into Israel to which Israel responded with airstrikes. The government also allowed \$15 million from Qatar to go to Gaza to fund salaries of Hamas personnel and ease tensions.

Government uncertainty, if not turmoil, in Israel remains, caused by a number of factors: popular anger, especially in those areas such as Sderot, affected by Hamas rockets; the resignation of Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the nationalist party, Yisrael Beiteinu, which he withdrew with five seats from the governing coalition; the refusal of the prime minister to appoint Naftali Bennett, education minister and leader of the pro-settlement party, Jewish Home Party, with eight seats, but to appoint himself to the vacant position. In the multiparty Knesset, the result of the proportional representation system, Netanyahu now has a

coalition majority of one, with 61 out of the 120 members. New elections are likely within a year or so, but are not immediate.

However, little attention has been paid in the international media to the continuing political and diplomatic attacks by international organizations, including the misnamed UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO, which should know better words, on Israel. The issue goes back to the creation of Israel in May 1948, and the animosity has never relented. On November 22, 1974, UN General Assembly Resolution 3236 (XXIX) affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, independence, and sovereignty. A year later, the UN set up the UNGA Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a body which in fact is composed of all 193 UN member states. Since then this issue has been the subject of numerous Resolutions by the UN and its various organs.

On November 17, 2018, the Committee met, with Saudi Arabian Abdullah al Mouallini as vice-chair, and approved eight Resolutions on Palestinians and a ninth on the Golan Heights. No Resolutions, of course, were directed against any of the other 192 UN member states, none of whom apparently committed any violations of anything. The Committee voted in favor of four Resolutions related to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, UNRWA, and four others critical of Israeli authorities actions in the Occupied Territories.

The Committee was also given a briefing by Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Gaza Strip, about the poor economic conditions in the territory. The lack of neutrality on Israel by UN personnel is manifestly shown by this Canadian professor of law who among other things urged economic and travel sanctions against Israel, virtually BDS activist, to force withdrawal from the West Bank, supported Israel Apartheid Week at his university, Western U in London, Ontario, and suggested Israel should have UN membership

suspended over violations of international law.

Briefly, the Resolutions, all passed with approval of 155 or more members, called for assistance to and assertion of human rights of Palestinian refugees, concern for the properties and revenues of those refugees, support for UNRWA, condemnation of Israeli settlements including in East Jerusalem and the "Occupied Golan Heights," condemnation of Israeli practices affecting the Palestinian people and other Arabs, and application of the Geneva Convention of August 12, 1949 regarding protection of civilian persons in time of war in the territories.

For the U.S., the most significant was the non-binding Resolution condemning Israeli control over the Golan Heights, which passed 15-2 (the U.S. and Israel) and 14 abstentions. Before 1967, Syria shelled Israeli communities from Golan. Israel, after briefly losing control of Golan Heights in 1973, now controls two-thirds of the area, and in 1981 applied Israeli civil law to the territory. The Resolution calls on Israel to desist from changing the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the Occupied Syrian Golan, OSG, and to desist from establishment of settlements. It states that all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel that alter the character and legal status of OSG are null and void, and constitute a flagrant violation of international law. It calls on Israel to desist from imposing Israeli citizenship and Israeli identity cards on Syrian citizens in OSG, and "from its repressive measures against the population of the OSG."

It is also worth noting that in the Committee meeting the Syrian Ambassador, Bashar al-Jaafari, declared that Syria will regain the Golan by "peace or by war." He said nothing of the 22,000 Druze in the Golan Heights, who speak Arabic, and have families in Syria, let alone the demilitarized buffer zone or the Israeli wineries in the area.

What is important are two factors about this Resolution. The U.S. did not abstain, as it has customarily done on similar Resolutions, but voted against it, and said it will continue to vote against them. U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley spoke strongly of the anti-Israeli bias in the Committee and in the UN organizations. She indicated the militarization by Syria of the Golan border, the lack of fitness of Syria, responsible for killing half a million of its own people, and the killing or expulsion of more than 3,000 Palestinian Arabs, to govern anyone.

She was also critical of a number of other factors: Russia for delivering a S-300 antiaircraft system to Syria; Iran which is establishing a permanent presence on the Syrian side of the border; the terror tunnels still being built by Hamas; and the Hamas rocket fire and violent activities against Israel. The 155 countries voting for the UN Resolutions appear myopic: they cannot recall that Hamas has already launched three wars against Israel. and that its Charter calls for control of all the territory.

The challenge is stark. The Palestinian Permanent Observer to the UN said the international community stands behind and supports the Palestinian cause despite the efforts by the U.S, to change this. The community also defies reality in supporting UNRWA which claims that the number of Palestinian refugees that began in 1948, is now five million. John Bolton, presently U.S. National Security Adviser, stated that the UNRWA aid program is the only one in history based on the assumption that refugee status is hereditary.

The second factor is an interesting display of cognitive dissonance. The Resolution reaffirms that the acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. In the Resolution, sponsored by Cuba, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, Israel's presence in Golan is described as illegal, but no Resolution says anything about Russia/Crimea, or other

issues.

Israel faces internal and external problems, with its fragile government coalition, Iran's increasing military influence in Syria and Lebanon, and possible another war with Hamas. The UN members might note that the leader of Hamas in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, said in future it will target Israel's major towns including Tel Aviv. There may, at present, be no good solutions to issues in Gaza, Hamas, or Syria. But the beginning of wisdom is that the international community should refrain from one-sided denunciations of Israel, and concentrate on Israeli plans for infrastructure projects in the Negev desert, and other projects such as solar power, sewage treatment, clean water, increase in jobs, improved public health, desalination plants, gas pipelines, and electricity grid.